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ABSTRACT

The 10-year history leading to publication of "Making the Jump: A Resource Book for Teachers of Aboriginal Students" is chronicled. The book focuses on acceptance of the Aboriginal students' home language, often a creole or a dialect of English, and the use of that language as a jumping-off point for teaching Standard Australian English (SAE). The book was designed for use in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, but the approach and resources can be applied to other students who speak creole or a non-standard dialect of English. The FELIKS (Fostering English Language in Kimberley Schools) professional development course was developed by a language team within the Catholic Education Office consisting of linguists and English-as-a-Second-Language resource teachers. The course was designed to inform teachers and Aboriginal teacher assistants of the validity of the Aboriginal children's language and provide ideas on how to approach the teaching of SAE. The projects' goals and the positive response are described, and the evolution of the book to provide follow-up materials is explained. These included the book, two University of Notre Dame Australia courses, and orientation workshops for new teachers. (MSE)

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THE STORY OF FELIKS — BIDIALECTAL EDUCATION

This paper tells the ten year story of events which lead to the publication of the award winning book *Making the jump: A resource book for teachers of Aboriginal students*. In 1998 this book won the Primary Teacher Reference Category of The Australian Awards for Excellence in Educational Publishing. Although designed for Aboriginal students in the remote Kimberley region of Western Australia, it has been shown that the approach and resources can be applied to students who speak creole or non-standard dialect of English.

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Introduction

Every year in the Kimberley, new teachers arrive from all over Australia to teach Aboriginal students in Catholic, State and Independent system schools. Some are graduates, some are experienced teachers and some are trained to teach English as a second language. But very few have any understanding of the language situation they are about to face in their classrooms. In fact, many are unaware that their students do not speak Standard Australian English (SAE) as their first language. Our question—and theirs—has been 'Why don't they have this knowledge?' Obviously there are some gaps in teacher education. That is why we decided to present this paper at this conference in keeping with the theme of 'New trends in second language teacher education'.

In September 1997 the Catholic Education Office in Broome launched a resource book for Aboriginal students. It is called *Making the jump: A resource book for teachers of Aboriginal students*. This book is an attempt to partially fill the gap. The focus is on the acceptance of Aboriginal students' home language and the use of that language as a jumping off point for teaching Standard Australian English. The trialling, writing, drafting and production of the book began in 1995 but the seeds were sown long before that.

Background

The Kimberley area is in the far north of Western Australia. In some ways it can be regarded as one of the last frontiers but in recent years there has been a lot of focus on this area. Mining ventures such as the huge Argyle diamond mine and more recently tourism have brought the region to the attention of people across Australia. There are large numbers of Aboriginal people in the Kimberley, many still speaking their traditional languages and practising their cultural activities. However this is rapidly changing as the population of non-Aboriginal people increases and the pressure of the English language is strong.

Although many of the Aboriginal people still speak their old languages, the children in general, do not. Rather they speak the new English-based language, Kriol. In the towns many speak a dialect of English, known as Aboriginal English. This affects the work of classroom teachers who have the task of teaching Standard English to the Aboriginal students of the Kimberley. For many years people in general have tried to ignore Kriol and Aboriginal English, hoping that they would go away and be replaced

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by Standard English. This has not happened and, in fact, the Kriol language has become stronger and spread to new areas.

Kriol, as with creoles and pidgins the world over, has been a low status language and those who speak it have been told that it is an inferior language, and that they need to learn to talk 'properly' (i.e. use the Standard English dialect). One result of this is that many older people have stopped using the traditional indigenous languages with their children and favoured Kriol hoping to give their children a better start and prepare them for the English speaking school system. It is doubtful whether this has helped; it may even have hindered the children, since their knowledge of the English-based Kriol can itself be a barrier to the learning of Standard English.

Linguists have now identified that Kriol is a valid language with its own vocabulary, grammar and sound systems but the speakers of the language and the teachers of the students often need to be convinced of this. Aboriginal English too has had low prestige in the eyes of its speakers and others. Aboriginal English has been defined as the dialects of English which are spoken by Australian Aboriginal people and which differ systematically from SAE. Although many would like to see Kriol and Aboriginal English die out, this does not appear to be at all likely. One reason for this could be the strong identity they provide for their speakers. Whatever the reason, we can expect that the majority of Aboriginal children in the Kimberley will continue to speak either Kriol or Aboriginal English as their first language.

It was while working in the Fitzroy Valley in the 1980s that Joyce first became interested in the linguistic needs of the Kriol-speaking children learning SAE in the local schools. In 1987 she and Anthea Taylor, a lecturer at the time with Edith Cowen University, wrote an article for *The Aboriginal Child at School.* In it they made the following statement, "It is our opinion that until the language situation (involving Standard Australian English and Kriol) and its implications for education are faced, clarified and described accurately, the majority of schools in the Kimberley will not be able to adequately meet the educational needs of Aboriginal children." (p.6-7)

FELIKS Professional Development Course

It was to this end that the Fostering English Language in Kimberley Schools (FELIKS) Professional Development Course was developed by the language team of the Catholic Education Office, Broome. This team consisted of linguists and English as a Second Language (ESL) resource teachers. We worked to provide a two day professional development package that would inform teachers and Aboriginal teaching assistants of the validity of the children's language and give them ideas on how to approach the teaching of SAE.

The goals

The FELIKS Professional Development Course for Primary Schools aims to enable participants to:

- understand that the English-based speech of Aboriginal children in the Kimberley is a valid language,
- develop the practice of 'focused listening',
- identify patterns in the children's speech,
- understand how Aboriginal English/Kriol differs from Standard Australian English and how this affects communication,
- develop suitable classroom activities to ensure that children will learn to code-switch consciously.

FELIKS is NOT:

teaching teachers to speak, read or write Kriol or Aboriginal English

The response

It was somewhat surprising to find just how warmly the information contained in the package was welcomed by a majority of teachers. One of the reasons for this enthusiasm was that they felt it explained many of the difficulties they were experiencing in the classroom. However, Aboriginal adults who attended the professional development days did not always take so kindly to what we were saying as they had to overcome the stigma that had always been attached to the English-based languages. At most places where FELIKS was presented the local Aboriginal staff would take a while to be convinced that we were aiming to teach their children to control Standard English. The fear they all had was that we were intending to teach the teachers and children to talk, read and write Kriol.

On the other hand, there were instances when the reaction was very different and Aboriginal staff members found the information presented to be personally liberating. They were at last able to acknowledge this linguistic aspect of their heritage instead of being ashamed of it. As we had been concentrating on the needs and reactions of the Aboriginal students rather than the adults in the school, this type of intensely personal response was deeply moving.

In the beginning, as FELIKS was a product of the Catholic Education system, it was only delivered to staff working in Catholic schools. The need, of course, was across all systems so it wasn't long before we were talking and sharing with teachers and consultants from the Education Department of Western Australia and the Independent Aboriginal Community Schools. As we saw that the course was useful and wanted by others, the package was prepared for publication in 1994 and several workshops were arranged to train presenters who could deliver the two day course.

With more and more schools participating, it became obvious that, to bring about change in the classrooms, we needed to build on the initial reaction to the in-service by providing teachers with practical ideas they could use with their students. After every FELIKS day, teachers would ask for something more; something to take away with them. We had successfully raised their awareness to the language situation but had included only a small amount of practical application. The constant request was for more input on how to put the ideas from FELIKS into practice.

In 1995 our job descriptions changed as we began working with schools on the development of follow up materials based on this approach. With the help of enthusiastic classroom teachers, these were trialled and have formed a major part of the newly published book, *Making the jump: A resource book for teachers of Aboriginal students.*

The trialling process

Because we wanted the book to be used constantly in the classroom, we decided to invite five schools, from town, semi remote and remote communities, to act as trial schools. Interested teachers volunteered and in each school two class teaching teams consisting of teacher and Aboriginal teaching assistant began to use the games and other activities with the students. They began by taping examples of the students' speech and identifying several areas of SAE which were causing difficulty for their

students. We then suggested appropriate games and activities for them to trial in the class. For approximately eight months, they kept journals and provided valuable feedback on the students' responses. A number of their suggestions, stories and ideas have been included in *Making the Jump*. At the end of the trial period new tapes were made. In most cases there was a discernable difference in the students oral use of SAE and teachers reported more positive attitudes towards SAE combined with a sense of pride and interest in their home language whether that was Kriol or Aboriginal English (AE). We are grateful for the work done by these trial school teachers and ATAs—it provided the impetus for the task of writing the book.

The FELIKS approach

As time went on and people from all education systems—Catholic, State and Independent—had opportunity to attend the FELIKS course, the term began to take on a meaning of its own, quite unrelated to the original intention. People would talk about their school being FELIKSed or about teaching FELIKS activities or having a FELIKS lesson. As developers, we were not at first pleased with this but soon saw that it was a positive thing which we should go along with. So the FELIKS approach was born.

The FELIKS approach focusses on teaching SAE as a second dialect. Although Kriol can be shown to be a separate language, we believe that, because of its English base, techniques for teaching Standard English as a second dialect (TSESD) as well as general ESL strategies need to be adopted. The FELIKS approach is, therefore, appropriate for those who teach Standard English to both Kriol and AE speakers. Central to it is the Code-switching Stairway which has two functions. It serves as a framework for describing the approach and is a tool for planning language work in the classroom. (It is not a developmental continuum of students' language skills.)

It is the ability to switch between Kriol or AE and SAE according to the context that the FELIKS approach aims to develop for all students. Chapter 4 of *Making the Jump* looks at the Code-switching Stairway in detail. Each step is described and a number of activities and games are suggested.

In Chapter 5 we answer the question, 'how does the FELIKS approach fit into my language program'. Firstly it is important to understand that the FELIKS approach to language teaching is not a program in itself. It is more a starting point for teaching English and combines easily with First Steps and Stepping Out from Western Australia; programs and resource materials from the Northern Territory and South Australia; and classroom procedures such as shared book, modelled writing and language experience activities. These programs all have similar principles and involve strategies which encourage language development through interaction, co-operative groupwork, problem-solving and explicit teaching. All underline the importance of teaching language in context.

Another important aspect of the FELIKS approach is the identification of English features which have proved difficult for Aboriginal students. These are addressed through explicit teaching which involves the use of specially designed and adapted games. The activities in the classroom gain meaning as teachers and students work together on contrasting and comparing the language used at home and at school.

However there is a major drawback to even the most effective of professional development packages. How many times do participants leave a final session

excitedly planning creative ways of incorporating what they have learnt into their classroom programs but six months down the track those brave new ideas have been put on that well known 'back burner'. Sometimes this is due to the pressures of classroom life, the ever-expanding curriculum, increased administrative demands, sports days, excursions, or NAIDOC week celebrations. Teachers need ongoing support to keep the level of commitment high enough to effect change.

Once all Kimberley Catholic schools had been 'FELIKSed', we had assumed that it would simply be a matter of organising the Day 1 program for new teachers at the beginning of each year and providing sessions to update cluster groups of schools. This wasn't the case and the workload increased alarmingly as the interest from schools outside the Catholic system grew. Also, the high level of staff turnover meant that each year we might lose more than a quarter of newly trained staff. We could see ourselves repeating the pattern until we retired! It was clear that we needed to stop, explore the options and come up with new ways to get the information about the FELIKS approach across to new teachers and provide continuing support for those already using the approach in their classrooms. About the same time it was suggested that perhaps we needed to look beyond the teachers of today to those who are still in training to "get them before they hit the classroom".

On going Professional Development

As a result of much discussion, trial and error, we came up with a three point plan to target teachers:

- before graduation,
- on arrival in the Kimberley,
- in the classroom.

Before graduation

To provide trainee teachers with the opportunity to learn about the English-based languages, the FELIKS approach, and strategies for teaching Standard English as a second dialect, we have worked with the University of Notre Dame Australia to develop two units. One focusses on the classroom and the other on the languages. Both these units have been offered at the Broome Campus. They are:

> **ED 430 Teaching Aboriginal Students: English Language Acquisition**
> Control over Standard Australian English (SAE) is a powerful tool for Aboriginal people to have and this unit aims to furnish teachers with specialised knowledge and skills to use with their students as they work towards achieving this control. It will focus on the teaching of SAE to Aboriginal students whose first language is either one of the traditional languages, an English-based creole, or a dialect of Aboriginal English. It will provide an overview of current ESL theory and practice before concentrating on the specific needs of speakers of English-based creoles and dialects. The unit will explore local and interstate programs developed to support Aboriginal students in their acquisition of SAE. In addition, we will consider current language development programs such as First Steps in the light of the linguistic needs of students. A number of overseas projects involving creole-speaking English language learners also will be examined. Throughout the unit the emphasis will be on the practical classroom application of the knowledge and insights gained by participants.

ED 438 English Based Languages and the Aboriginal Student
This unit addresses issues relating to the teaching of Standard English to Aboriginal students whose first language is English-based, either a dialect of Aboriginal English or creole. Background of this will include research into the development of pidgin and creole languages, examples of their inclusion in education as well as looking at the features of Aboriginal English and Kriol in Western Australia. Implications for the classroom where Standard English is taught are considered. The unit will involve practical and/or literature based research.

Induction of new teachers
It was decided to get the message to new teachers soon after arrival in the area. Each year, week 5 of the first term is set aside for the induction of new teachers into Kimberley Catholic schools. During this Induction week the FELIKS approach is introduced through daily two-hour sessions. Background information on the development of Kriol and AE is included, as well as awareness raising activities and ideas for classroom activities. The main thrust is to show that FELIKS approach is not a program in itself. It is more a starting point and can be used across the curriculum.

The importance of teachers understanding the need for ESL and TSESD techniques is emphasised in the Induction program and there are practical sessions to show exactly how games can be used to help Aboriginal students achieve greater confidence with, and control over, Standard Australian English. Teachers are introduced to the contents of *Making the Jump* and ways of using it in conjunction with the above programs are discussed. Ongoing consultant support is provided through the Catholic Education Office, Kimberley Region.

Aboriginal community involvement
But it doesn't matter how many teachers we enthuse and train, without involvement from the Aboriginal community the whole thing can fall in a heap when committed teachers leave. So a fourth area to target is the Aboriginal teaching assistants (ATAs) and community members.

Many of the Aboriginal staff in schools, such as the teaching assistants while enjoying their role in the classrooms, do not want to train as teachers. To give them an opportunity to extend their own education and at the same time further equip them for working in schools, two courses, the Certificate and the Advanced Certificate in Education Practice were developed in Western Australia. These are offered as non-degree courses at the University of Notre Dame Australia, Broome Campus. The FELIKS approach has been included in the courses through an optional unit, called 'English for speakers of Kriol and Aboriginal English'.

Conclusion
Through this combination of training and support it is hoped that teachers will gain an understanding of the language situation and the necessary knowledge to deal with it in such ways that the majority of schools in the Kimberley will 'be able to adequately meet the educational needs of Aboriginal children'. Then those Aboriginal students will leave the school system proud of their home language and with confidence in their ability to switch to Standard Australian English when and if they choose.

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